Peter Dale Scott - Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies and the CIA (1992)

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COCAINE POLITICS : DRUGS, ARMIES AND THE CIA IN CENTRAL AMERICA / Peter Dale Scott

Interviewed and produced by Sue Supriano.
Steppin' out of Babylon no. 105

Dr. Peter Dale Scott, Professor of English at UC Berkeley and author of Cocaine Politics, discusses the background of links between the CIA and the drug trade in the world, as well as the politics in the various situations which effect the drug trade in Burma, Thailand, Latin America and the United States.

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[Music] welcome to stepping out of Babylon produced by Sousou praiano Babylon is everywhere if the isms and schisms not only within the system but within ourselves let's unify stand aligned and step out of Babylon [Music] [Applause] [Music] [Applause] [Music] [Applause] hi everybody my name is sue seprieono and my guest today is Peter Dale Scott Peter Dale Scott dr. Peter Dale Scott is a professor of English at the University of California in Berkeley and looking at a big pile of books he's written here including coming to Jakarta a poem about terror which dr. Scott describes as his most important work but probably not one that we're not going to talk too much about today but I want to let you know that it exists and he also has written along with Jonathan Marsh so Marshall and Jane hunter the iran-contra connection secret teams and covert operations in the Regan era is the

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operations in the Regan era is the subtitle and most recently cocaine politics drugs armies in the CIA in Central America and the co-author of that along with Peter Dale Scott is Jonathan Marshall so I want to welcome you dr. Scott and ask you to tell us all those things that are some of those things that most Americans and most people in the world don't know about what's going on with the CIA and the US

government and well what I would call the shadow government the the covert government what I call deep politics let me begin by trying to summarize what we talked about in cocaine politics that's the most recent book that we've written and it's the most current Americans are certainly aware that drugs are a very very very real problem that are turning whole communities into war zones the usual analysis of our drug problem is to say it's a problem of supply and demand and we actually talk but the government talks about supply side solutions which is doing something about countries like Peru and Colombia versus demand side solutions which then focus on the people who actually consume the drugs our analysis is quite different we say there are not two but three aspects to this problem and that there's the government dimension in between that we have to talk not just about supply side solutions and demand side solutions both of those kinds of solutions always target the powerless where there is people living in inner cities or whether it's peasants living in poor parts of the third world there is also the what we call the the governmental connection the vertical dimension to the drug trade which is powerful intermediate

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which is powerful intermediate traffickers who are powerful and who are successful because they enjoy some kind of privileged relationship to the governments under which they work and work in alliance with so that's why we chose to write about Central America in particular originally we had Contras in our subtitle but we were looking at the evidence accumulated about the involvement of Contras and their suppliers in drug trafficking with the not only the connivance but ultimately the protection of the CIA these kind of people occasionally would get arrested but wouldn't get brought to trial or at least would not would get only a kind of token sentence because the CIA had been using these people and did not want the truth to come out in a public trial so that there's a kind of protection conferred upon such people with what I call a CIA immunity if you work with the CIA then you're pretty sure that you're not going to get involved we had a very good example of this back in 1970 when of all people the Nixon administration arrested a number of ex-cia Cubans and announced that they had just broken the largest heroin and cocaine trafficking network in the country well in fact nearly all of those people got off it turned out they found one or another judicial technicality on which to let them off these people were simply too close to the CIA and too involved in past activities with the CIA to be prosecuted in open trials by the American judicial system we've had a number of such cases coming down to the Contra era when the they're frequently the biggest cases of

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they're frequently the biggest cases of their time and that's what our book is about a whole series of such episodes and the fact that these people got off so coming back to solutions to the drug situation it it seems very obvious to us that instead of always going after the the teenager or the peasant we should go after this governmental connection itself that you could say that's a utopian solution because the CIA is very powerful but we have such a crisis now that I think it should be a test for politicians are they willing to take on this issue and recognize the involvement of the CIA and the drug traffic or just be part of covering up the situation really do you think that most Americans understand the extent of the evolved evolved Monteux the CIA which is part of the government right of the United States my understanding is that this involvement is goes back to what the 40s I think I read the forties you could take it back even earlier but what we saw in World War two was an interruption of global trafficking and then right after world war two we saw the international drug traffic put back together with the not just the tolerance but in many cases the actual assistance of governmental intelligence agencies who wanted to use the drug traffickers particularly the the west and first above all the CIA wanted to use them in the fight against communism so they use the Sicilian Mafia in Italy and they used the Corsican mafia in France and those two mafias became the cornerstones of the European drug traffic and the principle rings who were importing heroin into North America and the United

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heroin into North America and the United States and then there was the Vietnam War I mean there was some of this I want you to get a history of it I do because I think I want I really want I don't think that people get it I mean it's such an astoundingly terrible thing that the same government that's saying they're stopping fighting you know the war on drugs and all that and is that the very same people or maybe not exactly the same people but well you know much more about this and I - but seems to me like the same people some of the same people anyway who are saying we have to stop all this are the same people who are perpetrating it and they are our government or some part of our government that is so I'm repeating it because it's so astounding I think that people go counter to our common sense doesn't it you know the way we're conditioned to think about things it's very hard to make that kind of fact fit into what we're you know I myself was taught political science in the university I was never taught anything like this and what I was taught about government would make such a fact virtually unthinkable I had very slowly and painfully doing the research I did into Vietnam it was really Vietnam that brought me into this trying to stop the Vietnam or becoming more and more interested in the the forces that had drawn us into such such a crazy war you know I mean anyone with any common sense could have foreseen at the beginning of the war it would be as horrible as murderous and ultimately is counterproductive as in fact it turned out to be and yet we went into it anyway why and I became aware of the fact of the drug trade just under the surface with the CIA's involvement in Laos and that was an area where the CIA had not just cooperated with drug

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CIA had not just cooperated with drug traffickers but really had helped build up the post-war drug traffic it's commonplace now to say that Burma is the number one source of heroin and opium for heroin in the world it wasn't always this way right after World War Two opium that they you only had about 40 tons of opium a year produced in Burma and most of it was consumed locally it didn't get into the world drug traffic we the CIA was backing the remnant chinese nationalist armies and when they were pushed into burma we gave them all kinds of assistance help them to build air strips to be able to move planes in and out it was on the surface of it a program to prevent the chinese communists from moving down into Southeast Asia but what was actually happening was that the I'll call them the KMT because that was the party of chiang kai-shek who controlled these armies all through the 20s and the 30s they had controlled China through their control of the drug trade they it's been estimated that half or more of the revenues of the KMT government of chiang kai-shek were drug revenues and now being pushed out of China they have no longer in touch with an opium supply and they turned Burma not just into a point of resistance to protect Burma in the countries south of it but a source of opium for a global drug trade so they forced the peasants there into a kind of economic slavery where they had to abandon their traditional food crops and instead start growing opium all the time we were giving them arms we were giving them equipment and giving them planes

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them equipment and giving them planes the comment comment on the comment on yes and they there was a kind of forced increase in production of opium in Burma from 40 tons in 1946 to something like 400 tonnes by 1954 it's fluctuated wildly up and down since then but it's up around 1,200 tonnes today and is probably we'll come back to this but probably at this point the number one source of heroin for for the world market now I think most Americans are aware that there have been waves of drugs that have hit America in the post the year since World War two people were aware of a heroin epidemic in the 60s in the 70s and they were aware of a cocaine epidemic in the 1980s well I remember when the Vietnam War was over maybe during the Vietnam War there were supposed to be like a million some enormous number of heroin addicts who were returning veterans yes and there was a lot of talk about it and then there wasn't anymore all right well the government's own statistics were that something like a third of the US forces in Vietnam became addicted to hard drugs we know what just sucking marijuana here but I believe hard drugs and this was not a permanent problem this died down in the 70s we lost that heroin epidemic what had happened was we had stopped fighting the war in Vietnam and it shows up in the statistics that the Golden Triangle which is essentially into China and Burma and a bit of Thailand where we had been doing the fighting it was up to about 1200 tons a

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fighting it was up to about 1200 tons a year at the end of the Vietnam War and when the war stopped and we pulled all the troops out and the local governments restored their control they were mostly communist governments but they were anti drug governments and production did not entirely disappear but it plummeted it went down from 1,200 tons a year down to about I think it was 200 tons in Laos and another 30 tons in in in Thailand I whatever the statistics were it was only a fraction of what it had been before and even more sharply reduced was the amount of this getting into the world traffic and we had a very sharp reduction in heroin consumption in the States but only for about five years because what happened was that the Vietnam War was finally over in 1975 but starting in 79 and 80 the CIA started a new huge covert operation this time in Afghanistan I'm just gonna back up for one second because I'm not sure you made clear about the CIA's involvement in the drug trade during the Vietnam War let me give the general model I'm not saying that the CIA brings the drugs into this country I'm sure they don't I am saying that they they go to a part of the world and they look for the strongest allies against communism and certainly in Southeast Asia the the allies that they chose were the Kuomintang who are involved in the drug traffic it's not just in Southeast Asia that they've this when they tried to develop the Contras in Central America in the 1980s they again looked to the strongest local forces and again these were drug traffickers and here what they really needed was a kind of large smuggling

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needed was a kind of large smuggling operation to smuggle arms to these non-recognized covert forces that were based in Honduras and Costa Rica so this legitimated planes flying in that were smuggling arms well the the cheapest way to get those arms smuggled in was to go to and they and I'm talking about the CIA going to people who were involved in the drug traffic and letting them do what they liked with their planes on the return legs of the journey so this is where you get these arms for drugs flights there were many different varieties of them but it there's no question you look at all the different aspects of the contrast supply operation there are many different phases because different factions rose and fill in CIA favorite but every one of these factions had its own drug connection so that it wasn't just an accidentally occurring thing it it was something that virtually every single contra faction was helping to finance its operations by being a site for the trafficking of drugs and so the same thing happened in Central America but we also got a new heroin epidemic in the 1980s because of the Alliance which was forged I have to say by Democrats under Carter Vignesh Brzezinski made a conscious decision to give CIA support to these various Mujahideen factions opposing the government in Afghanistan even though it was publicly known publicly known at the time that these Mujahideen were financing their operations by drug trafficking now what happened here I mean the the biggest story of all in some ways is Afghanistan because here is a case where

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Afghanistan because here is a case where Afghanistan has absolutely not been a factor in the world drug trade or in American drug consumption until 1979 which is the year that Brzezinski made this decision so you had zero percent of America's heroin coming from Afghanistan in 1979 and by 1981 after just two years of the CIA's covert operation the Reagan administration's internal documents were saying that it was over 60 percent coming from the Pakistan Afghanistan border and it was public knowledge eventually the General Accounting Office produced Statistics Canada produced statistics on the amount of heroin coming from that area and they estimated it as being over 50% in their public records so here was a thing where the heroin started coming into this country with the beginning of the operation and when people went to look at what was happening in Pakistan it became very obvious why was the same Pakistan Army trucks that were taking the CIA's arms up to the Afghan border were they trucks that were bringing the heroin back down the hole of the traffic was being protected by the Pakistan Army and this recreated what was happening in Central America where the drug trade in on the cocaine drug trade in Honduras which was being done by people supplying the Contras was being protected by the Honduran army who got a share of the profits and as far as I know that is still the situation today I want to remind the audience that you're hearing

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remind the audience that you're hearing Peter Dale Scott who is most recent book is called cocaine politics drugs armies in the CIA and from America and Jonathan Marshall is a co-author of that book and I also want to explain the the electric saw I guess is in the background it's almost impossible to find quiet places unless you're in studios which we are not but anyway I wanted to ask you about the Kerry hearings I had the I'd listen to those and I had the impression that the CIA and the in the military the US military in the in the u.s. u.s. CIA was absolutely opening up a basis even air strips in inside bases to drugs coming in coming out of Central America and into or wherever and into the United States the Kerry committee heard allegations about Felix Rodriguez that Allah pango Air Force Base in El Salvador nominally in El Salvador Air Force Base but what a big section of it was in fact run in effect by the Americans as a contra supply base there have been a number of allegations about drugs coming in and out of Elah Pengo we give almost no attention to that in our book because the most sensational allegations that were made in the Kerry Committee were then denied by Felix Rodriguez himself the man who was accused of being involved in this and the accuser then took a lie-detector test and didn't perform very well on it so from my point of view I've written about eloping goes since that was ill upon go in El Salvador agua kotti in Honduras were two bases

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agua kotti in Honduras were two bases where there were accusations that not only foreigners were using these bases but even the CIA's own airline southern air transport also being accused of having carried it seems to be the case that they made trips to Colombia which are hard to explain in terms of why would they do that if theirs their job is to be there supplying the Contras and in fact when the iran-contra story first broke the New York Times and The Washington Post had stories about allegations of there being drug trafficking at ELA Pengo air force base and we were promised at the time the story said that these stories would be investigated by Congress in what became the iran-contra hearings they never were they were not the the specific allegations were not investigated by Senator Kerry either senator Kerry I think chose his target well he he wanted to get the Republicans in his committee to sign a report with him and so instead of focusing directly on what the US military had done or the CIA had done he focused on what individuals had done and in fact at one point in the hearings he asked about of these traffickers who he had been working with and the attorney said oh you're trying to bring the CIA into this and Senator Kerry said no I'm not he said you mentioned that I promised senator Bora and I would not talk about the CIA well even though he didn't he still ran into so much trouble with his hearings so much plotting against him and there are a lot of stories which involved death threats to witnesses and so on I won't go into but it became very obvious there's very high power resistance to anybody getting into this story Senator Kerry even though as you just heard he was leaving the CIA out of it he still was harassed in all

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out of it he still was harassed in all kinds of ways and actually ended up before the Senate Ethics Committee for what he was doing he was able to clear himself but he learned I think just how much and how powerful the resistance is to anybody trying to get this story out you may have noticed the amount of denial the nation which is a left-wing magazine the other day printed a story which gratuitously attacked what it called a peculiar new genre of drug literature in what which says the CIA is part of the problem this articles in the nation specifically attacked al McCoy's book the politics of heroin talking about the CIA responsibility and then said this is absurd but it could just as they were actually talking about cocaine and could just as easily of been talking about we say in cocaine politics the only main stream review of our book was in the New York Times there was a an extremely dishonest review which trashed our book possibly by accusing us of a lot of things that we had not in fact said in the book and so this is why a lot of journalists I think learn to stay away from the story because I know that some of those who've gone after it literally have had their lives threatened right and some people probably died yeah well our time is just about up there's so much to talk about we could talk for hours and I and I just feel like it's so important for people to know and there's not that much we can say the positive word is about the causes and cures conference that we now have had a group who are

lobbying Congress to get it to look at the CIA dimension to the drug problem their names is the causes and cures coalition they're at 13 24 in North Capitol and W Washington DC 202 and their phone number there is 202 7 9

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and their phone number there is 202 7 9 7 8 106 if anyone wants more information they can get them from them they produced a wonderful video in which you have two veterans of the DEA both saying how their top suspects when they went after them inevitably ended up turned out to be protégées of the CIA assets of the CIA and one of them Mike Levine who's written a book Deep Cover talked about how when he had actually caught somebody red hand had given him 9 million dollars in a bank vault in Miami for some cocaine he heard that the the ia would get this man released he was released he went back to Bolivia and a couple of weeks later financed the so called cocaine coup in Bolivia in 1980 which actually installed the cocaine drug lords as the government of Bolivia for a couple of years and the CIA had been instrumental in getting this arrested man off so that he could go back to be part of that coup so you see just how bad the problem is yeah it's everything's kind of upside down it's opposite of what it's supposed to be and what they say it is it's pretty crazy making and that's why it's so important to get this information out and of course it's so it's the wrong people who also the wrong people the wrong countries that really get the flack a lot of the times we haven't really had a chance to talk about there's so many ramifications and that the so-called war on drugs is more likely to increase the flow of drugs coming in because it increases our connection with corrupt drug affiliated regimes in Peru and Colombia and elsewhere and that was exactly of course the mistake in Indochina which led to the great flow of heroin into this country back in the 60s and 70s and now we know that the American military is moving into Latin America right into and then and making alliances with say the

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then and making alliances with say the Colombian Army in the Peruvian army who are in turn in alliance with the drug lords in those countries and this is under the guise of stopping drugs right yes so it's totally Orwellian and upside down well thank you very much dr. Peter Dale Scott author among other things of cocaine politics my name's sue seprieono and thanks very much for listening

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